

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

TO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA IMMEDIATE

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FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER, HENRY A)

SUBJ: BACKGROUNDER ON THE MASAI

1. IN LIGHT OF SECRETARY'S VISIT TO A MASAI VILLAGE,
FOLLOWING SUBMITTED FOR THE INFORMATION OF HIS PARTY:

2. THE NOMADIC MASAI CONSTITUTE ONE OF THE SMALLER
TRIBES OF KENYA. BUT THEY ARE AMONG THE MOST COLORFUL
BECAUSE OF THEIR ELABORATE DRESS, THEIR UNIQUE SOCIAL
STRUCTURE, AND THEIR SIMPLE WAY OF LIFE DEVOID OF MATERIAL
IMPEDIMENTS, NUMBERING ONLY 130,000, THEY ROAM AN AREA
OF FORTY THOUSAND SQUARE MILES OF SCRUB AND GRASSLAND ON
BOTH SIDES OF THE KENYA-TANZANIA BORDER. THEY REACHED
THERE, OVER THE CENTURIES, WANDERING DOWN THE FLOOR OF
THE GREAT RIFT VALLEY POSSIBLY FROM WHAT IS NOW EGYPT.

3. MASAI LIFE REVOLVES EXCLUSIVELY AROUND THEIR CATTLE
HERDS. ANY ACTIVITY OTHER THAN HERDING IS INSULTING TO THE
MASAI'S DOMINANT GOD "ENKAI," AND IS PERSONALLY DEMEANING.
A TRUE MASAI WILL NOT BREAK GROUND FOR CULTIVATION, BURY
HIS DEAD OR EVEN DIG FOR WATER.

4. EXTENDED FAMILY GROUPS LIVE TOGETHER, CLOSE TO THEIR
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CATTLE (AND FLIES), IN THORNBUSH CORRALS ("MANYATTAS") AND

GRAZE THEIR CATTLE OVER THE SURROUNDING AREA UNTIL THE GRASS IS DEPLETED. THEN IT IS TIME TO BURN THE OLD VILLAGE AND MOVE ON TO BUILD ANOTHER TEMPORARY ONE ON NEW GRAZING LAND. THEIR HEALTHFUL DIET CONSISTS CHIEFLY OF MILK CLABBERED WITH URINE AND MIXED WITH THE BLOOD OF THEIR CATTLE, DRAWN FROM THE JUGULAR VEIN THROUGH A LONG HOLLOW ARROW SHOT INTO THE NECK. MEAT IS EATEN ONLY INFREQUENTLY, MAINLY FOR CEREMONIAL PURPOSES.

5. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN USE BRIGHT BEADS AND COWRIE SHELLS FOR PERSONAL DECORATION. MOST MEN CARRY SPEARS BOTH FOR PROTECTION AGAINST WILD ANIMALS AND AS A SHOW OF MANHOOD. THE ELABORATE AGE-GROUP CIRCUMCISION, BODY-PAINTING AND SOCIAL RITES CONNECTED WITH THE COMING INTO MANHOOD OF YOUNG WARRIORS, OR "MORAN," LONG HAS FASCINATED SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS.

6. THEY ARE FOR THE MOST PART OUTSIDE THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE OF THE COUNTRY, A PROUD AND SELF-SUFFICIENT PEOPLE.

MARSHALL

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